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Lake Erie level expected to be lower in summer

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CLEVELAND (AP) -- Lake Erie could be a foot lower this summer than last.

The prediction is based on decreased precipitation in Ohio the last six months and smaller snow packs in the upper Great Lakes, Ohio officials said.

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For boaters, a lower lake level could make running into rocks, stumps and other obstacles more possible, said Dan Fuller, a supervisor in Ohio's watercraft division.

"You can't assume that water you previously boated on is safe, even if you boated there 15 to 20 years or more," he said.

The lake's water level in February is nearly the same as last winter, but officials expect the level to rise less than normal during the spring.



Forecasts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory and the Army Corps of Engineers say the lake's summer peak level will be eight to 12 inches below last year's peak, Snyder said.

Experts say Lake Michigan's level as fallen to near-record lows.

The last few days of February likely will not alter the picture, said Dale Helgerson of the National Weather Service in Sullivan, Wis.

He said the only notable winter weather event this season was Milwaukee's 49.5 inches of snow that fell in December.

Dave Schweiger at the Detroit office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said the

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lake-level outlook is dismal.

"You never like to talk about record lows, but when Lake Superior is only 6 inches above the 1926 low, it's hard to look for much improvement," he said.

Lake Superior feeds the Great Lakes.

The lakes' shrinking ice cover compounded the problem because ice reduces the amount of lake water that evaporates, Schweiger said.

With warmer temperatures in sight, Schweiger said the lake will lose even more water before the end of the month.

Northern Wisconsin received heavy snow this season, but most of it came as lake-effect snow from Lake Superior and won't help levels, Schweiger said.

Lake Superior's level is 600.13 feet, 10 inches below what is considered normal.

Lake Michigan and Lake Huron stand at 576.74 feet, 9 inches below normal and 3 inches lower than last Feb. 23.

"As things start to thaw, as we get a little more rain, it will rise a little," Schweiger said. "The problem is, it's not going to rise enough. We can hope for a really wet spring."

The National Weather Service's 30-day forecast doesn't call for a rainy March.

The Corps of Engineers outlook shows levels might recover an inch in Lake Michigan and Lake Huron before March 23, but Lake Superior could fall by an inch during the same period.

On the Net:

National Weather Service: http://www.nws.noaa.gov/

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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: http://www.usace.army.mil/

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